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ABSTRACT

The job search for assistant professors in the area of composition and rhetoric may be divided into four phases: the application, the interview at the professional conference, the campus interview, and the formal job offer. Following an introductory section which speaks to all phases of the process, this paper concentrates on the latter part of the interview process. It offers the following practical advice: (1) subscriptions or access to the "MLA Job Information List" and the "Chronicle of Higher Education" should be secured by September; (2) have a member of the faculty unfamiliar with the applicant's work review his or her credentials; (3) spread the net wide in the job search--apply to many schools from a wide geographic area; (4) know that the application process is expensive ($250); (5) request that the department provide a mock interview; (6) know that interviews may be requested only days before they are to occur; (7) review university catalogues; (8) prepare questions for interviewers; (9) anticipate questions from interviewers, such as how does teaching inform research and vice versa; (10) request a copy of the interview itinerary; (11) clarify who is covering travel expenses; (12) anticipate interviews with the vice president of academic affairs and department faculty and a classroom presentation; (13) request interviews with the director of human affairs to discuss benefits; (14) prepare a teaching portfolio; and (15) do not accept an offer over the phone--request it in writing. (TB)

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Becoming Literate in the Employment Line: Graduate Students' Strategies for Job Placement

> *"We need more candid information and more vigorous help in finding jobs. But above all, we need more jobs,"* demands President of the MLA Graduate Student Caucus, Erik D. Curren in his recent *Profession 94* article (57).

I view my contribution to this forum as a response to one of Curren's requests. I am here with candid information about the 1994-95 academic job search for those graduate students seeking tenure-track, assistant professorship positions at colleges and universities. My hope is that the literacy lessons I learned in the last six months assist you as you contemplate, begin, or continue your job search. A cursory glance through the October *MLA Job Information List* should boost our confidence, for 42.7% of the advertised jobs note composition/rhetoric in the job description. This percentage is encouraging, however only slightly so. As several search committees reminded me, it is a "buyer's market." [Show diagram.]

In an attempt to help you negotiate the market, allow me to divide the job search into four phases: the application, the interview at the professional conference, the campus interview, and the formal job offer. While any one of these phases alone is worthy of a panel discussion, for the purposes of my presentation, I will speak only briefly about the application and the interview at the professional conference. Most of my suggestions are intended to assist you with the latter part of the interview

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process. I do not mean to be presumptuous about your employment opportunities, but my experience taught me that due, in part, to the drastic decline in the number of academic positions available in the humanities, departments anticipate fewer students actually progressing through the interview circuit and are therefore less prepared to advise you through the process's entirety, and, as one of the professors with whom I work admitted, "Those professors who have not been on the market recently, really don't know what it is demanding anyway."

Works Cited

Curren, Erik D. "No Openings at This Time: Job Market Collapse and Graduate Education." *Profession 94* (1994): 57-61.

Huber, Bettina J. "Recent Trends in the Modern Language Job Market." *Profession 94* (1994): 87-105.

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The Application

1) Subscriptions or access to the *MLA Job Information List* and the *Chronicle of Higher Education* should be secured by September if you intend to apply for jobs in the fall.

2) In addition to having your dissertation committee review your cover letter, c.v., and research abstract, ask a professor in your field who is not familiar with your work to review your application. In addition to the many questions you may have about your application, be certain to ask the reviewers to tell you what makes your application distinct. If they believe your distinction(s) will make you an attractive candidate, ask them for advice in showcasing those distinctions in your application.

3) While personal and professional commitments may persuade you to conduct a localized job search, I urge you to cast a wide net at the outset of your search. You want to circulate your c.v. Once you have a clear sense of your real options, then you can be more discriminatory.

4) Know that this step in the process is both time consuming and expensive. If you do a broad search, you should budget approximately $250 for stamps, photocopying, and transcript and dossier requests.

The Interview at the Professional Conference

1) Request that your department provide a mock interview for you.

2) Know that you may receive requests for interviews as late as the day before an interview is to occur.

3) Review the university catalogues for whom you have interviews. Familiarize yourself with university programs and departmental courses that you believe may impact the job for which you are applying.

4) Prepare specific questions for the interviewers about the departments and the universities such as

   a) What is the relationship between composition and literature in your department?
   b) How would you describe the writing theory that informs your program?
   c) What role does the department play in your school's unique Upward Bound program?

5) Anticipate questions that ask you to link your scholarship and your teaching. Most often these questions appear in two forms:

   a) How does your teaching inform your research?
   b) How does your research inform your teaching?

6) Prepare working bibliographies for at least two courses you would be interested in teaching.

The Campus Interview

1) Request that a copy of the interview itinerary be sent to you.

2) Clarify which travel expenses are covered. Make space on your credit cards for the expenses. Most universities will reimburse you for all of your expenses, but the check may be awhile in coming.

3) Anticipate interviews with the dean, the Vice President of Academic Affairs, and the department's faculty and a classroom presentation.

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4) Request interviews with the Human Resources director to discuss benefits and with the librarian to discuss research opportunities for you and your potential students.

5) Prepare questions for those with whom you will interview:

   a) Of the dean you may ask questions about the college's commitment to writing instruction, about other departments' professional relationships with the department you may be asked to join, about travel funds, or about the university's definitions of research and community service.

   b) Of the VP of Academic Affairs you may ask questions about the university's perception of writing instruction, about the relationship between faculty and administrators, or about the university's role(s) in the surrounding community.

   c) Of the faculty you may repeat many of the questions you have asked others. You may also ask them to describe the student body, making certain that they know you are aware that you are asking for a stereotype of sorts. If you have the opportunity to meet with junior faculty individually, you may ask about the department's tenure record or more personal questions: what is it like to be a woman in this department, a white male, a woman of color?

6) Request to make your presentation to students and faculty. Ask for clarification on the kind of presentation you are expected to make:

   a) Does the search committee want you to present a conference paper? to give a lecture or workshop?
   b) Or does the committee want you discuss the ways you bridge your research and teaching?

7) Anticipate problem-solving questions from administrators, faculty, and students.

8) Prepare a teaching portfolio. You want the faculty and students to have a clear sense of what they might be getting if they hired you. Your portfolio should include a list of the courses you would be interested in teaching along with corresponding working bibliographies for those courses and syllabi and writing projects for classes you have taught. You want to demonstrate the range of your teaching skills. (I have a copy with me of one of the portfolios I prepared.)

9) Know that you will be the center of attention for the duration of your interview.

The Formal Job Offer

1) Do not accept an offer over the phone or in-person. Request a written offer.

2) In reviewing the offer, be certain that it answers these questions:

   a) Is it a binding offer?
   b) Is the position competitive?
   c) Does the offer indicate rank, salary, and whether or not the position is tenure track?
   d) Are moving expenses included?
   e) Are "initiation of research" funds available? (i.e. computer, software)
   f) Does the offer indicate the date by which your dissertation must be completed?
   g) Are health benefits included?
   h) Is junior faculty release time available?
   i) What is the teaching load?

3) You have up to two weeks to respond to an offer.

4) Know that this is your opportunity to clarify and to negotiate the terms of the offer. Once the offer is made to you, recognize that you are engaging in a business contract, a contract with which both parties should be satisfied.

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